

How to Start and Run a Summer Camp



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Introduction

Summer camps are a source of fond childhood memories for many people. They can be a setting for enrichment — whether that’s learning a new skill, exploring the arts, or engaging in athletic pursuits — or just plain old fun in the sun. In fact, the concepts behind summer camps are so varied, they can be whatever you want them to be.

This guide will show you how getting your own summer camp up and running is actually easier than you’d expect. With some creativity and organization, you’ll be well on your way to creating an unforgettable experience for young people. We’ll discuss the legal procedures required to get started and how to set up registration, pricing, hiring, activity ideas, and so much more. Many of these steps aren’t specific to summer camps — they can apply to any type of camp.

Technology is breaking down many of the barriers to entry when it comes to starting your own camp. With the right tech solutions, you’ll be able to quickly and effectively create a camp that resonates with children and parents alike.

How to Start a Summer Camp

Deciding on the type of summer camp

What type of camp do you want to create? Answering this question requires a bit of consideration and is a good time to take stock of your goals, skills, and passions.

Keep in mind logistical considerations. Do you want your camp to be a day camp or an overnight camp? You have to consider your budget, your camp's setting, and your staffing situation before you can answer these questions, as day camps and overnight camps have very different financial considerations to keep in mind.



Pick something you feel uniquely qualified to provide. For instance, if you're a musician, maybe you can share your expertise with a younger generation. Creating a camp based on a skill of yours is a good way to provide something valuable and unique.

You also want to pick a summer camp theme that's going to excite you and keep you engaged through the ups and down of the camp organization process. Though getting a summer camp up and running is easier than you might expect, there is still a great deal of paperwork to do during the process.

You should also be aware of the market around you. If there are multiple popular sports summer camps in your area, it might not be the best idea to start another sports summer camp. Ideally you want to bring a new summer camp idea to your locale. If the people in your area don't have a certain type of summer camp, note that deficiency when deciding on summer camp ideas. This is a great

opportunity to use JotForm for market research. You could create a form asking parents what they want out of a camp — what do they want their children to learn, what logistical considerations do they have, and what do they feel is missing from current camp offerings?

Be open-minded. While many summer camp ideas are probably summer camps for kids, you might be surprised to learn that more and more adult summer camps are popping up, providing adults with career enrichment, couples counseling, and other skills and activities that are relevant to more mature age groups. Lots of different types of camp ideas can work as long as you're approaching the situation with creativity and passion.

As you decide on your summer camp, check out the [JotForm blog](#) for information about using forms to make your summer camp run more smoothly. Want to know how to get started setting up a basketball summer camp form or just a general sports summer camp form? The blog has advice for drafting those and many other types of summer camp forms.

Developing a business plan

Having clear business goals in mind — and a step-by-step plan to meet them — lies at the heart of every successful summer camp. You want a camp that's built to last. This page will emphasize the steps and detail the various elements that go into a thriving summer camp business plan. But at a broad level, here are a few things you'll want to consider as you get started with your camp:

- **Market research.** Before you can really build your business plan, you need to know the market. What are people looking for in camps? What is the landscape in your area, i.e., are there lots of working parents who need to drop their kids off somewhere during the day? Are there many parents in the area encouraging arts or athletics? Build an online form with JotForm to ask these questions and pinpoint just what the families in your area are looking for in a camp.
- **Marketing.** Now that you know your market, what sort of marketing materials do you want to invest in? Who do you want to target? Craft a marketing campaign that reaches your target audience with compelling content. Video, blogs, etc., are all great creative avenues to go consider as you build your marketing plan.
- **Budgeting.** How much are you planning on spending to run your camp? What will your staffers be paid? How much does it cost to rent the land you're using (if you are renting)? Make sure you keep every little thing in mind when developing your budget. Small costs can add up, particularly for overnight camps. towels you'll need to spend money on is accounted for. And then work with an accounting firm (if possible) to ensure that your budget is correct and your books remain updated.
- **Pricing and profit goals.** How profitable do you expect your camp to be? When considering your budget and the potential costs you'll be dealing with, what pricing tier do you think your camp will fall into? It's important to consider the market you're in when answering these questions to see if pricing your camp at a fairly high level is a viable option.

As you can see, all of these elements work together. You can't measure profitability without conducting market research, and you can't decide on pricing until you have an idea of how profitable

you expect your camp to be. Working with a business professional is a good idea as you develop your camp. While you need business knowledge to start a camp, such expertise likely isn't a camp manager's primary skill. Learn from others and follow the data to make sure you have a business plan that's built to last.

Finding the right physical location

While we've already spoken a bit about how digital tools can make the summer camp creation process easier, you can't forget that summer camp still requires a physical space. While you can use digital tools — including copious internet research — to look for possible locations, you'll still have to get out into the world and look for a space on your own two feet. Here are some things to consider as you look for the right location.

Find a space to suit your idea — not the other way around. How much outdoor space do you need? What equipment are you going to need — and what sort of space does this equipment require? In short, consider the theme of your camp and the activities that campers will be taking part in. Let that guide your choice of a space, rather than choosing a space without much consideration and bending the plans for your camp to fit this space.

Consider costs. You'll need to consider cost and value while choosing a space. For instance, if you need to scale back some of your camp activities to afford a given space, be open to this sort of compromise. In the same way you might consider a new home or apartment, analyze your location from a cost-benefit standpoint. Maybe you'll give up some space for the chance to put your camp in a convenient location.

Is the location convenient? You want children and parents to be able to easily access your camp — so it can't really be in the middle of nowhere, especially if it's a camp that requires daily dropoff and pickup of attendees. Since camps are typically a great option for busy, working parents, you want the location of your camp to work with their busy schedules. Otherwise, they may opt for a camp that's closer to them and easier to get to.

Remember the basics. While it may sound obvious, you want to make sure your camp is in a safe location with adequate restroom and first aid options.

While it will hopefully not be necessary, you'll want your camp to be close to a hospital in the event of an emergency. Being near these necessities puts parents at ease, ensures that children are safe, and helps your campers feel more comfortable.

Does it feel special? Practicalities aside, you want your location to feel special. It should seem like a place where memories will be made. You'll usually know if a space feels "right." Don't rush into choosing a space. Look around, consider your options, and choose a location that will help your camp make an impact on the lives of your campers.

Laws and regulations

Running a summer camp is a massive responsibility. That's why it's imperative that you complete the correct legal procedures and fill out the appropriate paperwork before getting your camp up and running.

The documentation required and procedures you need to follow as you start your camp vary on a state by state level. [This list of regulations](#) on the American Camp Association's website will give you a better idea of the oversight your camp will be subject to.

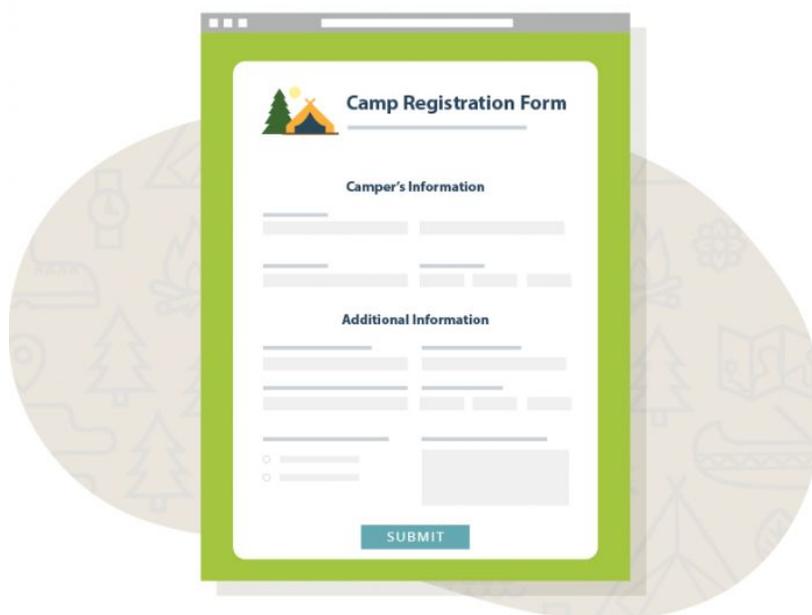
Regardless, you will need to collect waivers, especially if you are planning excursions and day trips. When it comes to day trips and excursions, you will also need permission slips signed by parents.

JotForm offers e-signature options, including DocuSign and Adobe Sign, file upload capabilities, and a variety of form field options. Forms can be customized with dropdowns, single- and multiple-choice questions, images, and more. Your waivers and documents can be as comprehensive as you need, and can be designed to match your camp's website and brand.

Administration and Marketing of a Camp

Registration forms

Proper administration of your camp keeps everything organized so that you can spend less time worrying about paperwork and more time creating a fun, engaging experience for your campers. The registration form is the first step toward fostering a sense of organization at your camp. Using an online form builder like JotForm can make the process of camp registration simple.



Online forms also make it easy to keep track of the exact number of applications you've collected without laborious counting. You can then see all of your campers' applications in one place and sort them accordingly.

Need to quickly compare two applications? Online forms make this easy, enabling you to pull up applications quickly without any time-consuming sifting through piles.

Saving time by using online forms that are easy to customize, fill out, save, share, classify, and track

Using an online form can help you quickly accept payments, save registrant information, and share information with your team. For instance, JotForm integrates with various payment processors such

as Square and PayPal. This means you're able to simultaneously accept payments and get detailed registrant information. All of your information is in one place.

Ready to share your information with your team? Online forms make this easy. With JotForm, numerous third-party integrations help you quickly bring information into your office's organizational systems. You can connect your registration forms with CRMs, email marketing services, and spreadsheets — saving plenty of time.

And don't worry: If you need to collect signatures or image files for camper IDs, online forms make it easy. Gone are the days of thick files with multiple sheets of paper for ID photocopies, signed consent forms, and registration information. Now you can have all of that information in one easy-to-navigate place.

Not all the forms are the same

But what sort of information do you need from your campers? That's up to you. Many online forms allow you to customize form fields so that you can get only the information you need — nothing more, nothing less. If you need particular information for your camp, easy customization can help you include useful fields.

Maybe you're running a music camp and need to know which instrument each registrant plays and their skill level. All you need to do is customize your forms to collect that information.

If some of this information is sensitive, you'll need online forms that keep the data secure. JotForm offers full HIPAA compliance, meaning you can collect the health information that you need to safely run your camp.

How to set the price for camp

Once you've developed a solid business plan for your camp, make sure you're pricing your camp fairly. Keep in mind your budget and profit goals, but don't forget to consider the market you're in and the affluence of the area where you're drawing potential campers.

Profitability of a summer camp

In the previous section, we discussed deciding on a summer camp registration fee. This is a difficult decision that depends on plenty of factors. Beyond considering budget, you also must decide how profitable you want your camp to be. Assuming your camp isn't a nonprofit, you'll need to have hard numbers and profit margins — and then settle on a fee that helps you hit them.

[According to a recent ACA survey](#), camp profitability is on the rise. More than half of the camps that participated in the survey reported profits, including a median profit value of \$90,000 and a 16.2-percent average profit margin. Though overnight camps tended to report less profit, 45 percent of them were profitable (with 28 percent reporting a profit of \$100,000 or more).

With these numbers in mind, it's important to remember that every camp is different and profit margins tend to vary greatly between camps, regardless of type. While day camps tend to post greater profit margins, their profits can still be volatile. Perhaps the most encouraging takeaway from the survey is the fact that profits are trending positively over the past 12 years that the ACA has collected this data.

In short, the industry is thriving.

One of the highest expenses that comes with running a camp is staff salaries. This is, of course, a vital expense, though it's worth carefully calibrating staff salaries in relation to registration fees so that you can continue to pay your staff fairly while setting up your camp to be profitable. As costs add up, you may need to look elsewhere for revenue sources. In the past, camps have found supplementary revenue from renting their facilities to others, running programs for school groups, or running adult programming.

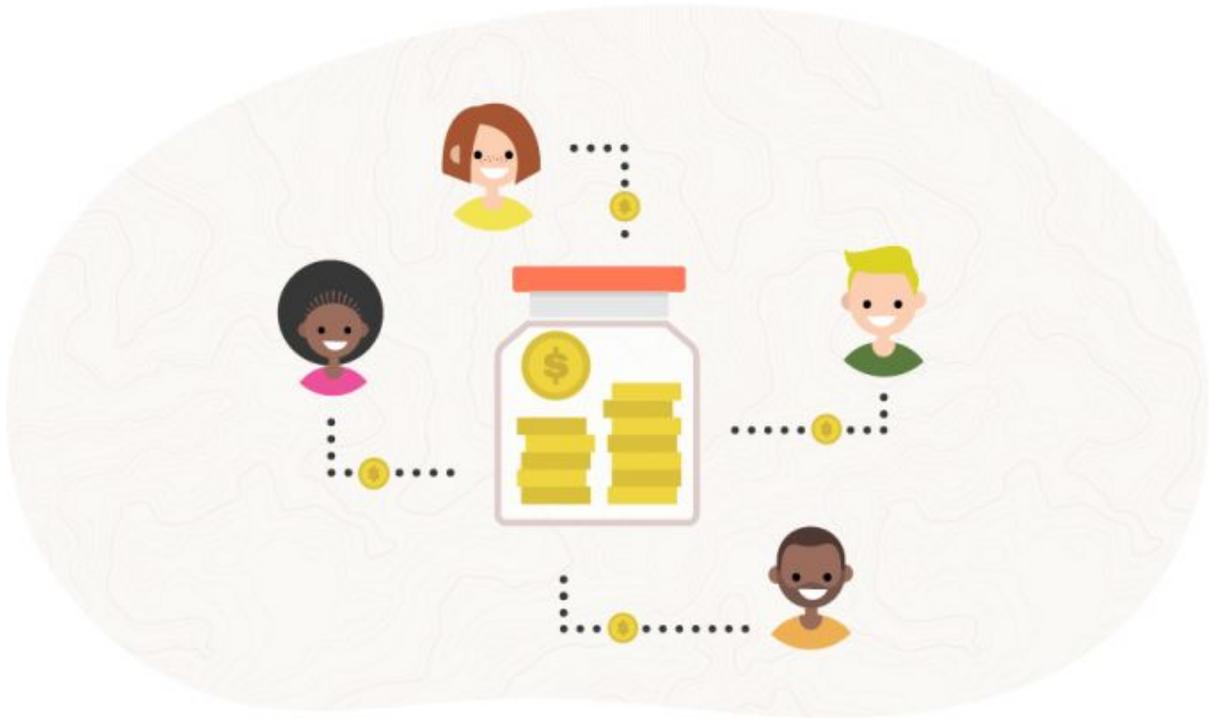
Calibrating the length of the camp is also important for profitability. Maybe you need to add more camper days to collect more money and justify increasing the price of your camp. You must first take into account the expenses that come from running your camp longer — and whether this will impact the quality of your camp.

Running a profitable camp helps assure that you'll be able to maintain your camp for years to come. It also allows you to make improvements to your programming and potentially pay your staff more. Luckily, there's a vast trove of data to help you decide on a price and structure that allows your camp to be profitable. And amid it all, it's good to know that the summer camp industry isn't just one that impacts the lives of young people — it also turns profits.

Benefits of collecting the applications and payments together

One of the main benefits of using an online form for camp registration is the fact that all of the information you need — names, contact information, etc. — will be in one place. This extends to payment information too. If registrants are using PayPal, Stripe, or other payment software, you'll need the information associated with those accounts.

If you need to collect subsequent payments during the summer or give refunds, having that payment information in one place makes this process much easier for both you and the registrant. This also is the case if you're setting up recurring payments for the camper throughout the summer.



Keeping application information and payment information together allows you to easily contact the camper if there are any issues with their payment. With an online form, this information is easily accessible, and issues can be solved quickly.

Campers who have a scholarship or a sponsor mean more paperwork for you to keep track of. Storing this information with other camper details helps you stay organized.

Keeping all camper information in one place makes the whole process simpler and less prone to (costly) mistakes.

JotForm features

JotForm comes with a variety of features to make the online form building process easy and effective for businesses of all types. In the summer camp space, customers have found certain features to be particularly useful as they set up the administrative infrastructure for their camp. Whether it's useful customizations, powerful integrations, or other lesser-known features, JotForm has found ways to satisfy camp managers.

Finding the right marketing channel and setting the budget

Now that you've decided on some of the specifics of your camp, it's time to come up with a marketing plan. The sell for a camp isn't too hard: you're providing a service for campers and parents alike that has the chance to enrich their child's life. Physical or academic enrichment, lifelong friendships, timeless memories. The marketing copy writes itself! Still, you need to find the right people to market to and come up with a summer camp marketing plan that reaches these parents. Here are some ideas:

Market to busy parents. We've [already discussed this](#) a bit, but it bears repeating. Busy parents see summer camp as a huge boon. It keeps their children busy in a safe way while they are at work. Once you zero in on busy parents as your audience, you'll have an easier time deciding which marketing channels to use.

Pay attention to SEO. In general, parents will discover your camp while researching camps online — they will rarely go directly to your site unless they're a returning customer. So it's important to optimize your site to gain search engine traffic. Using specific keywords and phrases that describe your services will help your site rank as high as possible and drive more traffic to it.

Consider your budget. If you're starting a new camp, you might want to put more money into advertising to make sure people know about your camp. Since you don't have a stable of returning campers to rely on, it might be a good time to experiment with paid advertising to make sure your camp is showing up in search results. This is especially useful for new camps because you might not have the SEO built up to drive a lot of organic search traffic.

Develop a branding strategy. Branding is a major part of your summer camp marketing plan. All of your ad materials should convey a consistent tone and aesthetic. More and more, successful camps are successful brands. For example, a summer camp that is marketing to serious athletes must convey a different tone than a musical camp aimed at younger children. This extends to social media as well. Create social copy that aligns with your camp's tone.

Market year-round. Your camp may run in the summer, but your marketing plan should be running at all times. This can be as simple as uploading pictures of last summer onto Instagram throughout the year. This helps you stay engaged with past campers, and potentially encourage them to return, and keeps your camp visible beyond just the summer months.

What you do will depend on your budget. You'll need to take some time with a financial advisor to figure out how much you can spend. Social ads tend to be rather cheap in the grand scheme of things, so investing in social might be a cost-effective way to draw attention. And, as with any marketing plan, put money in what works. If placing your camp in camp directories is paying off, it's worth investing in that and finding more directories. In short, follow the channel that's driving conversions.

Marketing options

When it comes to marketing your camp, you have lots of options. Social media has been a huge game-changer for summer camp advertisements, as social channels tend to be populated by audiences with an interest in summer camps.

But ultimately a holistic plan is best. That means using the different types of marketing channels at your disposal — social, summer camp websites, digital ads, physical ads, in-person meetups — and adjusting your budget based on which channel is most effective.

Summer camp website directories. There are plenty of sites that list different summer camps and allow users to filter by camp type, location, etc. Considering the number of camps out there and the at-times intimidating process of zeroing in on just the right one, these can be a great tool for parents looking for a camp for their child. That's why it's essential to get in one of these directories.

Digital ads. While this is a slightly more expensive option, having eye-catching digital summer camp advertisements can go a long way toward driving attention to your camp. This requires design assets — whether this includes your camp's logo, the use of images from your camp, graphic design elements, or some combination of all of the above — and likely some written copy, such as a slogan or concise description of your camp. Using advanced ad software to have this ad run in the social channels of someone who might have searched for “summer camps in the Boston area” could help you reach your target audience.

Physical ads. With all of these newfangled advertising options, it's easy to forget how effective a good physical ad can be in terms of drawing attention to your camp. And physical ads are affordable. Designing and printing flyers can cost only a few dollars. Then, hanging these flyers up at, say, local schools or libraries can catch the eye of parents. They're a great way to engage your audience at the top of the funnel, piquing their interest and encouraging them to learn more.

Pounding the pavement. It's obvious: you're the best spokesperson for your camp. As founder, you're the most passionate and ultimately the most qualified to talk up your camp to interested parties. That's why it's a great idea to get out there in person as much as possible. If you have the chance to visit, for instance, schools or rec centers and present your camp at some sort of camp exhibition or summer activities fair, you'll get to meet so many potential campers and convey your enthusiasm in a face-to-face environment.

Advertising your camp doesn't have to be complicated or prohibitively expensive. What's most important, especially in the beginning, is trying a diverse range of advertising methods and studying what works and what doesn't. Then focus on investing in the channels that drive campers to your site and forget the methods that aren't working.

Summer camps aren't huge multinational companies with eight-figure advertising budgets. Instead, you have the chance to create a marketing and branding strategy that feels personal and directly driven by your own enthusiasm for the camp.

Using testimonials from past campers, heartwarming imagery from past installments of your camp (if applicable), and information about you and your background is great way to convey your camp as a kind of a family — one that's passionate about improving the lives of its campers.

Risk Management and Waiver Forms

The most important thing to remember when running your camp is the amount of trust parents are putting in you and your staff. That's why safety has to be your number-one priority — and why you need to take so many precautions before getting your camp up and running.

Summer camp parental consent forms. During the registration process, you need to get consent from parents. This can be for the camp in general, as well as for specific day trips you have planned throughout the summer. It's simple: permission slips and consent forms are evidence that a parent knew about and approved of an activity that was happening at camp. Say your camp offers a physically intense activity such as ziplining. You want to make sure that parents are aware this activity is happening ahead of the camp experience and that they grant permission for their child to participate in this activity.

Summer camp medical forms. A thorough medical history of each camper should be provided before your camp begins. These forms alert you of any allergies or medical conditions that a camper has so that you can proceed accordingly for the duration of the camp. For instance, if a camper needs to take a certain medication regularly, you can make sure that routine is being observed and that the camper is properly following any medical protocols.

Summer camp release and waiver. Release forms help protect camps in the case of an accident or other unexpected incident occurring at the camp. They're important legal documents that are key to the healthy operation of a camp. A release form outlines the activities and risks present at the camp and includes the acknowledgement and assumption of said risks. Release forms are a bit complicated; anyone who runs a summer camp should be intimately familiar with them. For more information, check out the American Camp Association's [Releases and Related Issues](#) page.

Consent forms, releases, waivers, e-signatures, terms of use

JotForm is well-designed to collect all of this necessary paperwork — from consent to releases to terms of use. JotForm also [makes it easy to collect signatures](#), so that the distribution, signing, and collection of forms is seamless.

There are parental consent, waivers, and medical [templates on the JotForm site](#). Browse the options and make sure you choose a form that is suitable for your camp and customize it as needed.

For instance, you can manually create a waiver form, adding as many text fields as you need to adequately outline the activities and risks that come with your camp.

As you create your waiver form, certain widgets might come in handy. For instance, you'll need to collect signatures in your form, so [using an E-signature widget](#) is a must. Say you need the signature of a primary care physician on a medical form. Online forms make it easy to send your form to the appropriate party and quickly collect the signature you need.

Waivers, releases, and consent forms can be wordy. How are you going to fit all of that fine print on one online form? Not to worry. The [short scrollable terms widget](#) helps you save on vertical space and lets users quickly scroll through the necessary text. This widget can also easily be configured to fit in with the look of your form. Lots of (important) text doesn't have to get in the way of a nice-looking and easy-to-navigate form.

If you're looking for a more general type of waiver, there are also plenty of [templates on the JotForm site](#) to use for this purpose.

With some know-how, it's pretty simple to create a comprehensive waiver, consent, or release form in JotForm. These are complex documents — it's worth carefully creating them and making sure you're outlining all of the necessary information (risks, activities, etc.) on the form and collecting all of the signatures you need. It may not be the most glamorous or exciting part of the camp management process, but it's arguably the most important.

You have the medical records and consent. But are you HIPAA compliant?

When collecting medical forms, you want to make sure you're respecting the privacy of your campers. HIPAA, the landmark medical privacy legislation, helps make sure this is the case. HIPAA compliance is vital.

Social Development in Childhood and Adolescence and How Camps Help

We all know that camp helps children of all ages get some fresh air, make memories, and meet friends. But child psychology experts have conducted studies and learned that the benefits of summer camps may run even deeper. Here are a few of the social development benefits of camp:

- **A time for unconstrained creativity.** Camp is many students' first opportunity to create things — art, written work, etc. — without having to worry about grades. The fact that camps have a feeling of leisure to them gives many students the freedom and willingness to try new things and reach new creative heights. Most simply, it gets students creating. Instead of playing video games, camp helps them learn how to make their own video game. Getting out of the house and into camp can be a great chance to fight teenage internet addiction, an increasingly urgent problem in the eyes of social psychologists.
- **A change of pace for unique learners.** Some students struggle in school. Whether it's an inability to sit still, a unique learning style, or behavioral issues, life in a classroom isn't always the ideal learning environment for a student. That's why camp can be so beneficial for those students who don't always thrive in a traditional academic atmosphere. Some camps can be remedial, presenting information a student may not have absorbed well in school — or they can spark a new interest, covering material that doesn't show up in many grade school curricula. Regardless, camp can be a breath of fresh air for students who want to learn but sometimes struggle in school.
- **Building friendships based on interests.** Many childhood friendships spring from serendipitous twists of fate, like hitting it off with a kid who lives down the street or sits next to you in algebra class. Camp presents the opportunity to meet friends in a new way and build a relationship around common interests. While any friendship is great for a child, one based around like-minded passions (e.g., music, computer programming, etc.) offers the possibility of new intellectual depth. Having involved discussions with another child helps kids develop mature communication skills and aids in social development in adolescence. And there are many stories about children at music camp forming a band or students at coding camp working together on future programming projects.
- **Developing a sense of independence.** For some children, going away to camp presents their most extended time away from home ever. While this isn't always easy (for children *and* parents), time away will allow a child to learn how to make decisions on their own in a new environment. If difficulties come up — social or otherwise — they'll have to rely on their own capacities to find solutions (with the help of camp counselors, of course). This problem-solving ability also builds confidence and makes children feel empowered.
- **Self-discovery opportunities.** The sad reality is that being a child or adolescent isn't always easy. Issues of bullying or social anxiety can make every day a struggle for certain children.

Camp can present a powerful escape from the difficulties of school and allow a young person the opportunity to slow down and get a better sense of who they are. Camp can put students in contact with different types of people that open their eyes to diversity, acceptance, and empathy. In short, the camp experience can be powerful.

Camp can feel like a fun, freeing adventure for kids. But sometimes the benefits go even deeper and transcend “fun in the sun.” Camp can give children the tools they need to deal with social or intellectual problems, skills that will stay with them for a lifetime. And while we’re talking benefits...let’s not forget how beneficial a camp can be for busy parents!

Summer Camp Program Design and Ideas

Program flow

What do you want to accomplish with your camp? In terms of enrichment and learning, what do you want your campers to come away with? These are vital considerations as you work on designing your camp program.

Having a clear schedule in mind for the whole summer is important on multiple levels. It keeps children on task and keeps your camp organized, so that there's never wasted time. It can also help children develop skills. For instance, maybe you run a music camp and want to schedule basic music theory lessons early in the camp, actual practice with instruments in the middle of the camp schedule, then a special concert toward the end of the camp. As the camp progresses, children accrue more skills and have a chance at the end of the summer to show those skills off.

If you have a more free-form camp without a clear arts or athletics focus, you'll want to schedule everything on a day-by-day basis. Maybe you start your days with a fun icebreaker activity, take a field trip in the middle of the day, and then have a fun activity like a scavenger hunt later in the day.

Again, scheduling the day puts children at ease. They know what's coming and realize you always have activities to keep them engaged.

Scheduling the activities at your camp on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis is crucial for effective camp management. Building a calendar of events that you develop alongside your staff is a great step toward an organized, enriching camp experience.

Summer camp activities

One of the most important parts of camp management is thorough planning. Going in with a plan can take the stress off you and your staff and keep the days moving so that campers are always engaged and having fun. And careful scheduling ensures that you're pacing activities appropriately, which makes for a well-functioning camp.

Overall, the opportunities for fun are endless. Do you want your camp to emphasize art? Sports? Academics? Here are a few general games and crafting ideas to get you thinking:

- **Scavenger hunts.** Scavenger hunts are a classic camp activity for a reason. They combine physical activity with problem solving for a fun competition that tests brains and brawn. And if you group campers into pairs or teams, scavenger hunts can also be a great way to promote bonding among your campers.

- **Camp Olympics.** “Olympics” is a catch-all term for any sort of competition. It doesn’t have to be sports, though that is an option. Any sort of tournament that promotes friendly competition among campers is a great way to get campers motivated to be active or produce great work.
- **Tie dye.** Creating crafts that campers can wear is popular for a reason. Making a tie dye shirt or a friendship bracelet is fun, foolproof, and sends campers home with a memento that they’ll treasure for years to come. Crafts are also a great idea on those pesky days when the weather isn’t cooperating.
- **Write and perform songs.** If you have a more performative group of campers, having them work in teams to write a song and then perform it is a great way to get their creative juices flowing. And if you want to put a more modern, competitive twist on this, you could even have campers participate in a rap battle.
- **Relay races.** Are your campers more athletic? Have them compete in relay races. A relay race requires teamwork and competition. You could even have campers make their way through a varied obstacle course so that they have to do a different activity on different legs of the relay. Introducing that kind of variety can make things a bit more entertaining.

There are many reasons to go into the summer with some camp game or crafting ideas. They can be pulled out a moment’s notice to get your campers excited and engaged. And while these are just a few ideas, many counselors enjoy coming up with their own games — which can go on to become classic, signature games at their camps.

Icebreaker ideas

A camp places several young people in an entirely new place surrounded by strangers. Taking children out of their comfort zones is one of the great benefits of a summer camp. But it takes a little while for campers to start feeling those benefits — and you’ll want to take steps at the beginning to make sure your campers are comfortable in their new environment with their new soon-to-be friends. There are quite a few tried-and-true camp icebreakers.

Behavior modification

Summer camp offers a new sense of freedom and exploration for children. While this is one of the best parts of camp, it can lead to some misbehavior. That’s why it’s necessary for any camp to have a clearly defined discipline policy. Your policy should respect the freedom of camp, treat children fairly, and promote better behavior for all campers.

Summer camp letters to parents

When it comes to sending their child off to camp, parents have concerns. It’s your responsibility to keep them in the loop so they know that their child is safe and happy at camp. One of the best ways to communicate with your campers’ parents is through a letter. This can be an introductory letter at the beginning of camp or regular follow-up letters. Though the term letter might make you think of paper, these can also be emailed to parents. But what should you include in this letter?

A little bit about yourself and your staff. What are your qualifications? Your experience? Why did you want to open a camp in the first place? Your campers' parents are probably wondering about all of these things. You should also introduce your staff. Have your counselors write up a quick blurb about themselves so that parents can learn about counselors in their own words.

What activities do you have planned? Give an overview of what a day at camp will be like for their children. What games do you have planned? Will children be working in teams or groups? What meals and snacks do you have planned? What about day trips? Details regarding everyday life at camp will certainly be of interest to parents and will put them at ease as they send their children off.

Give your contact information. Parents need a way to get in touch with you and your staff. While this will surely be included in other camp materials, it's never a bad idea to remind parents about how they can get in touch with you — and that you welcome regular contact if they ever have questions, concerns, or feedback.

Explain your goals. What do you want campers to take away from your camp? You should have clear ideas in mind regarding the enrichment opportunities that come with your camp. Outline them at a high level in this letter and explain why the activities and structure you have planned will help you achieve these goals.

Outline some history. When was this camp started? Are there special traditions at this camp? No, parents don't need to know every little thing about your camp's history. But including a broad overview adds some color to your letter and gives entertaining context.

Include past testimonials. If applicable, add some quotes from past campers. Or even add feedback from parents of previous campers. This will help you “show” rather than just “tell” prospective campers how great your camp is.

Summer camp letters are a great way to open up a dialogue with the parents of your campers. It sets them at ease, gives them the information they need, and lets them know that you're accessible and approachable. Put care into your letter — and proofread before sending it out.

Guarantee the Well-Being and Safety of Campers

Summer camp menu planning

When you collected registrations before camp began, you gathered medical forms that outlined your campers' medical conditions and allergies. These are important when planning your summer camp's menu. Even if you're running a day camp that offers only a small snack each day, keeping track of your campers' dietary restrictions is a crucial part of planning. Beyond that, you want to make sure all of your campers have access to delicious, nutritious food that fits their needs.

- **Find some recipes.** If you're providing meals for your campers, you'll need a lot of recipes. They'll keep you prepared and help your staff know exactly what to do when it comes to feeding your campers. Focus on recipes that are fairly easy to make, can be made ahead of time (and then heated up), and can be affordably made in bulk. You also want meals that can be quickly adjusted based on dietary restrictions and appeal to picky eaters (without serving chicken nuggets every night). Here are a few resources that can help you out if you're looking for summer camp recipes:
 - [Summer Camp Week on Food52](#)
 - Sites like Pinterest offer plenty of ideas for summer camp recipes as well.
- **Have a plan for purchasing food.** What grocery store are you going to get food from? Having a place like Costco or Walmart nearby that allows you to buy food in bulk (at affordable prices) is very important as you develop your menu.
- **Prioritize fresh fruit and vegetables.** They're delicious and healthy — you can't go wrong. With plenty of vitamins, minerals, and fiber, these options will make campers feel good and show parents know that you're providing their children with healthy options.
- **Emphasize foods that provide energy.** A day at camp sure can be long. That's why it's so important to offer foods that give campers energy — and plenty of it. This is particularly important if you're running a camp centered on sports or physical activity. Foods with protein, such as eggs, can give campers the physical energy and brain power they need to tackle the day. Nuts, yogurt, and fruit are also affordable, energy-giving options. Try to avoid refined carbs or sugary foods, as this can give campers a brief burst of energy that quickly turns to sluggishness. And it's probably best to avoid caffeine with younger campers.
- **Have a plan for dealing with special circumstances.** Whether it's a gluten allergy or a religious dietary observance, you need to make sure you're prepared for campers' special diets. This information should be collected on JotForm online forms at the outset of camp. When preparing food, carefully mark which meals are, for instance, peanut-free so that you can ensure the right meal goes to the right camper. Prepare these meals ahead of time if possible, as working on meals at the last minute can cause you to make mistakes. If you have a

camper who keeps kosher, for instance, make sure your kitchen is organized so that you can respect this observance. You don't want your camp to make campers with specific dietary needs feel unwelcome or disrespected.

- **Make your menu available to parents.** You need to be transparent about the food you're serving. That's why it's important to publicize the food you're serving, from ingredients to nutritional information. Many camps publish their menu on their website, with a note from the person in charge of culinary services. You can also send the menu home as a handout (with your contact information) so that parents can stay informed and discuss concerns with you as they come up.

Let's be honest: You can't order pizza for your campers every day. Going in with a clear plan and lots of recipes is the best route toward a fun — and delicious — time at camp.

Hygiene and sanitation musts

Camp can get messy. But when you're running a camp, you're running a business. This means you have to maintain certain hygiene and sanitation standards so that campers stay healthy and comfortable. Here are some musts:

- **Plentiful bathrooms.** When nature calls, your staff and campers need options. Making sure these bathrooms are clean, functional, and stocked with soap, paper towels, and more is also very important.
- **Plumbing inspection.** To make sure your bathrooms are functional, hire a plumber to take a look at your plumbing system before camp starts. If there are any problems at your facility, you can identify and fix them before campers arrive. And it's easy to forget about, but having plenty of purified water at your camp is vital for cleanliness and hydration. Make sure the plumber takes a look at the water — sometimes, the tap isn't a clean source of water, so you need to opt for a filtration system.
- **For resident camps, showers.** To make sure your campers stay clean at your resident camp, make sure you have a prescribed time for campers to take showers. Have your custodial staff regularly keep these showers clean and well stocked with soap and shampoo.
- **Have a chore chart or hire a janitor.** Keeping your camp clean is a lot for one staff member to do. Some efficient camp staffs have a detailed chore chart, and everyone pitches in to clean. Some camps even have campers pitch in on cleaning to teach responsibility and give them agency over their space. But if it's too much to keep up with, having a janitor on the premises or a regular cleaning service is useful.
- **Practice proper handwashing.** This goes for everyone at camp — the staff, the campers, and you. Make sure anyone involved in food preparation is washing regularly, and remind all of your campers to wash their hands before meals. This limits the spread of germs. It surely isn't the fun or glamorous part of camp life, but proper sanitation is so important for the proper functioning of your camp. It all comes back to being proactive and staying organized.

Summer Camp Staff Selection Process, Management and Evaluation

Job descriptions, applications, and policies

What exactly do you expect of your staff members? You need to make your expectations abundantly clear so that you and your employees are on the same page. A clear job description that outlines their roles, their tasks, and the skills they'll need to work effectively is a great jumping off point.

You can expand these job descriptions during the application and interview process. In your application form, you should give applicants the chance to explain what they'd bring to your camp and why their past experiences and skills qualify them for a position. You can accept applications, schedule interviews, and collect references in JotForm. This will make it easy for you to review applications and other materials all in one place.

You need to establish employee policies so that your staff knows the behavior that is expected of them. Obvious guidelines, like no drinking or drugs, should be a no-brainer and immediately disqualifying if broken. But you'll need other policies as well, so that your employees have the necessary tools to deal with the children in your camp safely and appropriately. (Because your hires will be working with children, you'll want to run a background check.)

Communicate these policies and put the infrastructure in place so that your employees are aware of the policies and have agreed to follow them. You'll also need to institute a system that ensures these policies are followed for the duration of camp.

Another major staffing factor involves salaries. How much will you pay your staff members? Will some of your younger staffers be volunteers? Will staffers who return in subsequent years make more than first-time staff members? These are all questions to consider in relation to your budget and profit goals. Ensure everyone is being paid fairly while still keeping in mind your business plan.

Why should you consider hiring international staff?

You want the best possible staff for your camp — people who are trained to work with kids and who are respectful, hard-working, and passionate about providing a great time for all campers.

This doesn't necessarily mean your staff has to be limited to U.S. citizens. Every year, thousands of young people come to the United States from other countries to work at camps.

It can be an enriching experience for campers and staff alike as they get to experience new cultures. Here are a few things to consider if you're working with an international staff.

Travel. If your staff members are coming from overseas, they're going to likely need to handle their own travel accommodations. Check in with them before the summer begins to assure they've figured out their travel plans. If they're heading over as part of a formal exchange program, fellowship, or grant, their travel may have been arranged for them.

Work options. Make sure your staffers have the proper documentation if they're working outside of their native country. This way you can make sure everyone is getting paid adequately and is legally protected for the duration of their employment.

Visas. If international staffers are going to be working in the United States, they're going to need a visa. Most people who have traveled outside of the U.S. understand how visas work, but [this article](#) gives some information about how they work at camps.

Getting your international staff ready to go at camp shouldn't be a headache. As with overall camp management, staying organized and being proactive is the best way to make sure everyone is taken care of and ready for a summer of hard work and fun.

Staff relationships

In the same way that your campers will bond over the course of the summer, so too will your staff. You'll all be spending a lot of time together, so it's important to develop strong relationships and work like a team. Here are some ways to help your staff members build relationships:

Bonding session. At the beginning of the summer, take your staff out for a big meal or a fun activity. Whatever stimulates conversation among staff members is best. This will be a great icebreaker and help your staff form close relationships before the summer even begins. This can be a regular event. A staff-only pizza party every Friday sounds pretty fun, doesn't it?

You're the peacemaker. As the camp's leader, you aren't just responsible for proper camp management. You're also responsible for managing people. This means handling disagreements and conflicts among your staff and working as an intermediary who keeps everyone happy so that they can do their best work. If certain people don't work well together, mediate the situation as best you can and have them work in roles that don't require them to be elbow to elbow everyday.

Treat everyone the same and balance workloads. Favoritism and unbalanced workloads are the easiest ways to cause conflict among your staff. Keep up with how much each staff member is doing. Get regular feedback from your staff so that you can be aware of problems that are arising and get an idea of how everyone is performing in their assigned tasks.

Keep relationships in mind when hiring. A lot of problems can be solved preemptively. That means hiring with relationships in mind. Sometimes you just know when someone will fit into your staff culture — and when they won't.

In general, try to hire staff members who are easygoing and fun to work with. It usually takes just a conversation or two to tell if someone's kind and enjoyable to work with.

Staff training

Hiring great staff is only a first step — you always want to train them so that they're set up for success. There are a variety of ways to approach summer camp staff training. Whether it's an early summer staff retreat, ongoing training over the course of the summer, or some combination of both, you want to choose a training regimen that works for you, your staff, and your campers.

Performance appraisal

Regular evaluation of staff is important for any manager. These reviews help you pinpoint places where a certain staff member can improve and areas where they've been particularly effective.

It's also valuable for a staff member to know where they stand and what steps they need to take to do their best. A summer camp staff evaluation can be a great way to set your camp up for success — and can easily be built with JotForm.

But what should go in your summer camp staff evaluation form? JotForm has several customizations that you can include. And don't worry — there are [templates](#) you can use to guide you along the way.

Keep in Touch with Campers During Postseason to Retain Them

Regularly update customers about your plans and developments after the camp, and keep in touch

All good things must come to an end — and summer camp is no different. But while you and your campers will go your separate ways at the end of the summer, this doesn't mean you can't keep in touch.

In fact, sending your campers regular updates is a great way to boost summer camp retention rates and assure they'll join you again next summer. Here are some ways to keep in touch with campers once camp is over:

A newsletter. There are plenty of platforms out there that make it easy to regularly publish and distribute a newsletter. Encouraging your campers' parents to sign up for this newsletter at the end of the summer and then sending them a letter every few months is a great way to keep them posted on your plans and developments for the upcoming summer.

Social media. Want your camp to remain a presence in your campers' lives year-round? Well if there's one thing young people like, it's social media. Regularly updating your social feeds — be it Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook — with interesting news about your camp is a great way to keep campers in the loop and build excitement for next summer.

Emails. Sure, it isn't all that creative, but regularly reaching out over email is a great way to keep in touch with your customers. When it comes to email, a personal touch really goes a long way. Don't get caught up in robotic marketing speak. Remember, you're talking to people who've already been convinced to join your camp. Now you want to take this chance to develop these relationships so that they will continue for many summers to come.

It's easy to kick back at the end of a busy summer of camp management. In fact, camp might be the last thing on your mind when autumn rolls around. But keeping in touch with campers is easy and so important when it comes to retention. It keeps campers and their parents informed year-round — and it'll have them eagerly awaiting summer!

Don't forget the camper satisfaction survey

There's a lot to keep track of when it comes to running a camp, but you definitely don't want to overlook the most important question: *Are my campers actually enjoying themselves?* That's why all camps need a summer camp feedback form to keep track of camper satisfaction. Whether you want to

regularly distribute this survey or just give it to campers at the end of the summer, you'll need a robust platform that can handle your campers' many data points.

JotForm takes the headache out of this process so that you can get the full picture of camper satisfaction. Get started with a few of our [summer camp feedback form templates](#) — then customize the form to fit your camp's specific needs.

Offseason program ideas

You've just run a great summer camp — but you've rented out your camp area for the whole year. Or maybe you own the land. Now what? This is a surprisingly common problem for camp managers, and it's one that's often solved with creativity and resourcefulness. Because at the end of the day, you have a great big stretch of land that's built for human enjoyment. The opportunities are endless — but to make it easier, here are a few ideas:

- **Business retreats.** You know, camp for adults! Companies big and small love to get out of the office for “off-sites” and where better to go than the great outdoors? Assuming the weather is cooperating, set your camp up for fun adult-focused outdoor activities. Team-building exercises, sports, or friendly competitions are all perfect for a retreat — and aren't all that different from what you were organizing at camp.
- **Youth sports.** Youth sports teams need land to play on. Many youth sports leagues happen year-round (for instance, many soccer leagues have fall *and* spring seasons), so you'll have plenty of opportunities to schedule games on your grounds. Just contact the management of these youth sports leagues and make sure your fields meet their regulations.
- **Adult sports.** More and more companies are starting softball leagues, volleyball leagues, and more to provide a fun, active diversion for their hard-working staff. Much like youth sports teams, these teams need a place to play. And they're also a bit more casual and laid-back than youth sports leagues, so it shouldn't be too hard to get them to schedule some games on your campgrounds, assuming you're in a convenient enough location.

Preparing for the next camp and evaluating feedback

Sure, your camp might run during the summer. But managing a camp is a year-round job. You'll be preparing for the next summer all year long, thinking of ways to improve and provide the best possible experience for your campers. Here are a few things you can do:

- **Evaluate camper feedback.** Wondering what you could improve going into next year? It's not rocket science: You have all sorts of useful feedback on your camper satisfaction surveys. Consult these to figure out where your camp thrived and where it came up short, and start working on a strategy to address concerns and emphasize the parts that went well.
- **Evaluate your budget.** Where were you wasting money? What ended up being a great investment? Were you overstaffed or understaffed? Figure out how well your camp performed from a business standpoint and get to work putting together a budget for next summer. You will almost always need to tweak your budget from the summer before.

- **Evaluate your staff.** Who performed well? What type of people tended to succeed as a staff member at your camp? Note the parts of the interview process that uncovered good candidates and start getting to work recruiting top talent to your summer camp staff. It's never too early to find some great staffers.
- **Go to workshops and stay informed.** The world of summer camps is fertile and ever-changing. Subscribe to helpful magazines and newsletters. Stay up to date online. Listen to podcasts from other camp leaders. There's a whole world of camp superstars who are ready to share their wisdom. Use it — and don't be afraid to share some of your own.
- **Get to work on your marketing strategy.** Did you spend too much or too little on marketing last year. Did it work? Assess your marketing strategy and figure out how you can improve it. Then get to work actually putting it into effect. Many camps market year-round and are always trying to find new campers.

Time off from your camp is a great time to take stock of how last year went and pinpoint the areas where you can improve. The summer's over and you're away from the day-to-day of camp management. Take this opportunity to think big picture and craft a plan for building the best possible camp experience.